Spotlight:
Nori Kieran-Meredith, M. Div.

In 1974, I was 26 years old, and about to make the biggest discovery of my life. I wasn’t happy teaching, although I loved the kids. I didn’t want to be a nurse, even though I had a gift for healing. I had no desire to be a concert pianist, even though I had the skills and the talent. I had long dreamt of missionary work, but scrapped that idea when I found out that half of Maryknoll lived at the motherhouse. I worked as a paralegal, but something was missing, both on my part and on the attorneys’. I could never make my jobs work, no matter how hard I tried.

I was told by professionals I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life, but was afraid to admit it, even to myself. Comprehensive testing determined my strengths and desires. I scored a four on being forest ranger and nine out of ten on being a priest. But I belonged to a church where woman priests were unthinkable! I had all I could do to cope with the vocational bombshell that had just exploded in my lap.

The Divine and I established a strong relationship. The priesthood was affirmed continually as my path. I was a good Catholic but doing what God asked of me was impossible. However, the call never stopped coming. I engaged the finest spiritual director and spoke with any number of clergy. The consensus? I truly had a priestly vocation.

God had to open the door. So what happened? God opened the door. For the previous fourteen years, I had been involved on and off with Dignity, the gay Catholic community. They invited a guest speaker, the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson. A female pastor! Unheard of! She spoke of 300 Metropolitan Community Churches, all ecumenical, whose theology was so simple and straightforward that every branch of Christianity could accept it.

I had recently landed a fabulous position with O’Melveny & Myers, one of the top law firms in the nation, and simultaneously spent the next seven years in night classes, earning my master’s degree in divinity. On line, I found Bishop Mark Shirilau, who, in Roman Catholic terms, had impeccable ordination lines. I was ordained to the Ecumenical Catholic Church and to Metropolitan Community Churches in November of 2005. Some four years later, to my vast delight, I began the process of officially becoming a Roman Catholic Woman Priest.

I currently serve Southern California Dignity chapters as a supply priest. In the future, I dream of coordinating other women priests to serve the Dignity community, finishing my clinical pastoral education, becoming a Red Cross chaplain, and earning a doctorate in ministry. Finally, I had found the vocation that was truly mine! It is my great joy to be ordained, and I could not be happier with my call or more confident that I have done precisely what the Divine asked of me.

Nori Kieran-Meredith, M. Div., is a member of the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests on the ecumenical front. She serves in the local school district with special needs kids, as a supply priest for Southern California Dignity chapters, and as a first responder chaplain with the Red Cross. In her spare time, she can be found atop Strawberry Peak in Lake Arrowhead, California, where she serves as a fire lookout.
From the Editor

By the time I have written this editorial, everything around me will have changed.

The sun is waning, casting long, faint shadows on the living room rug. Soon the heat will automatically kick in, and I will turn on the lights. The evening news will report either the good deeds of some recent hero, or that the earth has suffered another blow. Somewhere a mother cat is licking her new litter of kittens. Somewhere someone’s grandfather has died.

Meanwhile, my body is digesting the ham sandwich I ate for lunch. It becomes part of me as I sit here and measure ideas and words and write this piece. Even though much appears the same, little has remained the same…the universe, the day, the news, my home and myself…because change is the only constant.

This is your time and it feels normal to you but really there is no normal.

There is only change, and resistance to it and then more change.

Meryl Streep, Barnard College, 2010

All life involves change, which is the theme of this issue: explaining it, even microscoping it, sorting out its causes and its effects and most importantly, its inevitability. We might not like it. Many do not. Constancy with no surprises is so soothing and easy to accept.

Too bad. It’s not to be.

In this issue’s Spotlight, Nori Kieran-Meredith explains her calling to the priesthood. The Divine Verb highlights the ongoing presence and action of our Creator in the universe.

Ask Sophia attempts to comment on the problems of Catholics who, dissatisfied with their religion, have left the fold. The emergence of so many questioning Catholics is certainly a change. New News informs us that women in Ireland have accepted the idea of women priests, along with other male priests who dare to speak out in our behalf.

So many changes.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

A Meditation:

“Choose life – only that and at whatever risk. To let life leak out, to let it wear away by the mere passage of time, to withhold giving it and spreading it, is to choose nothing.”

Sr. Helen Kelly

Celebrating The Face of the Divine Presence In, Around, and Among Us! was the theme of ARCWP’s annual retreat in Cleveland. Members from 15 states, Canada and Colombia, South America, gathered to pray, play and grow our movement. The highlight for many was the opportunity to share our spiritual lives as priests, our ministries and how they shape us. Our time together ended with being sent forth with the music, "Go Make a Difference!"
The Divine Verb: 
Our Creator’s Imagination

VERB: (L. *verbum*) a word that conveys action, an occurrence, a state of being.

IMAGINATION: (L. *imago, imaginari*) the faculty or action of forming new ideas, images, or concepts of external objects not present to the senses.

We are about to embark on a journey of understanding God’s presence and action in the universe. This is quite a dramatic journey, one that sequences the conceptions, discoveries and rising consciousness of prophets, mystics, scientists, and religious leaders as they are led forward by the in-breaking of God’s Spirit. The ever-widening recognition of the Creator’s active existence in the unfolding nature of the cosmos will be the orbit of our travel.

In ancient times, the prescientific concept of the universe held by the Hebrew nation and their pagan neighbors was depicted as the Divinity residing above a dome, and the firmament of the sky just below the dome’s roof that contained the stars, the sun and moon, and the floodgates for the waters to enter the earth. The earth itself existed below with its mountains and seas, and underneath were columns that supported the earth, as well as “sheol,” which was the home of the dead or the nether world. Surrounding the nether world was the “abyss” located at the lowest levels of the ocean waters.

Ancient people experienced lives of tedious labor, war, suffering, pain, evil, oppression, birth, and death, with passionate and joyous moments scattered among them. Prophets appeared and felt moved by Yahweh to alert the various tribes to forego their sinful behaviors and restore their relationship with the One God of All. The Hebrew God was engaged at a distance, likely appearing with divine messaging through dreams, angels, bushes, and mountaintops. The ancients had a tremendous need to tell stories to explain how these differing facets of their earthen lives came to be. Much of the Hebrew Scripture writing referred to the elements of their life experiences in imaginative understandings that were composed and rules of life that were written. God’s Spirit pitched her tent and spoke to them within their grasp of the world in which they lived.

The popular belief that the earth was flat was held by cultures from 3000 BCE (Before the Christian Era) to the early decades of 300

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Ask Sophia

Q I am no longer a practicing Catholic because of the Church’s refusal to treat women as equals. I’ve heard there are more than thirty million Catholics who, over the years, also have left the Church. What are their reasons? Maureen O’Brien

Our question has as many answers as there are those who have made this choice.

Through my years of psychological counseling, I have found many leave because of mistreatment by cold, pompous church representatives who adhered to heartless rules that had no meaning, or simply didn’t know theology, and enjoyed playing God. As a LPC, working for years in a progressive Catholic Church, I was appalled by these stories.

“A long time ago, a priest told me that if I divorced, I could no longer attend Mass.”

“What? Of course you can attend Mass. Absolutely false! You had been physically abused for years. Your husband threatened to put your head through a wall! You had to get a divorce. I believe he would have killed you!”

She left the Catholic Church.

It’s so sad. Our living in an ultra-secular world is so trying, and a spiritual life is such a gift.

O blessed hope! The Spirit never gives up. As this issue proclaims, the Divine is a verb, not a set of rules, and is Constant Change. Pope Francis has called for a resurgence of Pastoral Care, and an end to unbending adherence to rules. He decries arrogance and condescension. He is compassionate, understands many aspects of human life, although many conservatives don’t. He has recently allowed the sacraments to be given to remarried divorced persons.

Why not? Who are we to rob others of the graces of a spiritual life? There is inherent danger in believing that the rules are more important than the people they are employed to help. This rigid attitude has turned countless people away from religion. As women priests, we welcome everyone who wishes to come and partake of Communion at our Eucharistic Liturgy. We welcome everyone to come celebrate with us, as did Jesus of Nazareth.

We will continue this discussion in our spring issue.

Maureen O’Brien was educated in Catholic Schools. She has served as Executive Director of the Leukemia Lymphoma Society in the Uptown New York-Vermont Chapter for nineteen years.

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Leading is published four times a year.
The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests are women and men committed to a renewed model of ordained ministry in an inclusive community of equals in the Roman Catholic Church. We seek equality for women in the Church that includes decision-making and ordination.

“"In Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

In 2002, on the Danube River, seven women were validly ordained Roman Catholic priests. The principle consecrating Roman Catholic male bishop, who ordained our first women bishops, is one with apostolic succession in communion with the Pope within the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, all qualified candidates, who are presented to our bishops for ordination, are ordained in apostolic succession by the laying on of hands. According to man-made Canon Law, the Church may consider us illicit, but our ordinations are valid.

A Message from the 37th Congress of Theology, Women and Religion
An excerpt from "Discrimination to Gender"; Spain, September 10, 2017

1. We have made a critical analysis of patriarchy as a system of domination against women, girls, children and the most vulnerable people in society.

2. Our critique extends to the religions, which have a patriarchal structure, transmit an androcentric ideology, impose a macho morality and develop sexist practices. In most cases women are not recognized as religious and ethical subjects, but considered as inferior, subordinate and dependent. They generate in them attitudes of obedience and submission qualified as virtues.

3. Religious leaders disqualify the theory of gender that they call “gender ideology” and consider it the most perverse of humanity. They condemn the feminist movements and the LGBTQI and show their opposition to the laws of effective equality between men and women. In their documents and public declarations, they frequently generate different forms of gender violence: sexual, symbolic, religious, psychological, and promote macho and homophobic attitudes and behaviors. They show insensitivity to gender violence, patriarchy, sexism and LGBTQI phobia.

4. We value positively the fruitful encounter between feminism and Christianity, which has provoked the rebellion of women against the patriarchal system and the birth of feminist theology, which recognizes the role of women. To quote St. Paul, “There is neither Jew nor Greek; neither slave nor free; neither man nor woman, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

The exclusion of women from the ordained ministry does not respond to biblical, theological or historical reasons, but is the result of the survival of the patriarchy installed in the leadership of power and the organization of religious institutions. We denounce the punishment of the excommunication of women ordained priests in the Catholic Church.

The Divine Verb, continued from page 3

BCE. Knowledge of a spherical earth slowly spread beyond the Greek world from then on. Thirteenth century Duns Scotus, philosopher and theologian, determines the physicality and the individuality of the person as distinctive from anyone else. Fifteenth century Nicolaus Copernicus, mathematician and astronomer, sets forth the belief that the sun – not the earth – is at the center of the universe. Sixteenth century Galileo Galilei, scientist, astronomer, and mathematician, supports Copernicus’ theory and observes movement through the telescope.

Despite opposition from religious leaders, God continued to speak through philosophers and scientists as their perceptions of a global and universal reality came into focus.

This is Part One of a continuing column that offers an overview of God’s creative energy alive and moving forward within the ever-expanding Universe.

Mary Eileen Collingwood, MTh., is a wife, mother, grandmother and educator, who serves ARCWP as bishop. She lives in the Cleveland, OH area and serves the Community of St. Bridget: An Inclusive Catholic Community, as co-presider.

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